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SIGNS OF INDIA'S VIRUS CURVE FLATTENING AS NEW CASES FALL

A sharp decline in the number of fresh Covid-19 cases since mid-September indicates India has crossed the virus peak

ACTIVE CASE COUNT DOWN, RECOVERIES UP

While 92,839 fresh coronavirus cases were recorded every day on an average between September 9 and 15, it has come down to 70,114 new cases per day between October 7 and 13, according to official data. Total active virus cases, too, after reaching a peak of 10.17 lakh on September 18, declined and stood at 8.12 lakh on Thursday morning

BUT, THE HORROR MAY NOT BE OVER YET

- There has also been a fall in the number of Covid-19 deaths. If on September 29, India registered a record 1,179 deaths in a day, this number has stayed below 800 over the last three days
- Experts, however, cautioned that number of cases and deaths may rise again, as a possible second wave of infections kicks in

72.8 days

TIME FOR COVID-19 CASES TO DOUBLE IN INDIA NOW. IT WAS 25 DAYS IN MID-AUG

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Oppn biggies form People's Alliance in J&K

To unitedly begin fight for restoring special powers the state had before August 5, 2019

FAYAZ WANI @ Srinagar

SOME indications of the revival of political activity in J&K emerged on Thursday as major mainstream Opposition parties like the Mehbooba Mufti-led Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Farooq Abdullah's National Conference and four others formalised their consolidation by forging a Peoples Alliance to demand restoration of the state's special status.

Fresh from her release from detention after 14 months, Mufti added heft to the meeting convened at Abdullah's residence on the Gupkar Declaration, which had, on August 4, 2019, vowed to safeguard J&K's special status — a day before Article 370 was hollowed out.

"We have now named it the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration. Ours is a constitutional battle," Abdullah said, adding the alliance will strive for restoration of the constitutional position of J&K as it existed before August 5 last year.

> We have now named it the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration. Ours is a constitutional battle
>
> Farooq Abdullah, National Conference chief

A meeting to evolve an action plan will be held in a few days. "We will struggle for restoration of the rights that were snatched last year from Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh," said Abdullah, who was the first mainstream leader and former chief minister to be booked under the stringent Public Safety Act after his detention on August 5.

For her part, Mufti said: "Gupkar Declaration is an amalgamation of NC, PDP, PC, CPI(M), ANC & JKPM jointly striving to restore the rights & dignity of people of J&K. The greatest disservice would be reducing it to PDP/NC or two political families."

Thursday's meeting was also attended by former chief minister Omar Abdullah, People's Conference chairman Sajad Gani Lone, J&K People's Movement leader Javaid Mustafa Mir and CPI(M) leader Mohammad Yousuf Tarigami. J&K Congress president Ghulam Ahmed Mir did not attend due to ill health.

National Conference chief Farooq Abdullah, his son Omar and PDP head Mehbooba Mufti at a meeting on the Gupkar Declaration in Srinagar on Thursday | PTI

RAIN-BATTERED NORTH K'TAKA GRINDS TO A HALT

A local resident rues the damage to standing crop after flood water inundated farm lands at Murnal village in Bagalkot district on Thursday. Several districts of the state, mostly in North Karnataka, are facing the onslaught of unrelenting downpour since the last couple of days. Incessant rain ravaged agriculture fields and residential areas in Belagavi. In Kalaburagi, NDRF personnel rescued nine people, including two children, from a school at Malkhed. Heavy rain in Chitradurga district caused distress among a section of the farmers. While ragi cultivators were happy, those growing onion, paddy and vegetables have lost a portion of their yield | HEMANTH D

Climbdown? Centre to borrow ₹1.1L cr to make up for states' GST shortfall

ANURADHA SHUKLA @ New Delhi

THE Centre on Thursday said it will borrow up to ₹1.1 lakh crore in tranches under a special window to bridge states' GST revenue shortfall. According to a Finance Ministry statement, the money "will be passed on to states as a back-to-back loan in lieu of GST compensation cess releases". This means that while the Centre will borrow the money, it will reflect in states' books.

Telangana Finance Minister T Harish Rao said, "It is not acceptable to us. The loan amount will be shown in the capital receipts of state governments. The burden will be on states."

However, Kerala Finance Minister Thomas Isaac welcomed the move. "But there is one issue yet to be resolved- how much of compensation is to be deferred to 2023? Negotiate this point and reach a consensus," he tweeted.

Former FMP Chidambaram, too, welcomed it, saying, "If the Centre has decided to borrow the ₹1.1 lakh crore and extend it to the states as back-to-back loans, I welcome the change of position."

Talking to *TNIE*, Department of Economic Affairs Secretary Tarun Bajaj, however, sought to downplay the notion that the Centre has climbed down from its earlier position. "There is no change in the government's stance. The Centre will borrow from RBI and the amount will be passed on to states as 'back-to-back' loan. This will have no impact on the fiscal deficit of the Centre," he said.

Clarifying the rationale behind the Centre's borrowing, another officer said, "When states borrow directly from RBI, interest rates will depend on their ratings. When the Centre borrows and passes it on to states, the rate of interest will be same for all states." Twenty-one states have so far chosen the special borrowing window to meet GST revenue shortfall.

'K'taka looking into FinMin's request for authorisation'

Funds to be borrowed under spl window

The letter acknowledged that Karnataka had opted for Option-1 and pointed out that in view of the shortfall in implementing GST, which is estimated to be Rs 1,10,208 cr for all states, funds will be borrowed under special window coordinated by the ministry for states like Karnataka coming under Option-1.

BANSY KALAPPA @ Bengaluru

THE State Finance Department is studying the Union Government's request for an authorisation letter regarding payment of interest and repayment of debt from future GST compensation. The state is expected to send its response by October 16.

Speaking to *The New Indian Express*, the state's representative in the GST Council, Basavraj Bommai said, "After the Finance Department goes through it, we will put send it to the Chief Minister who will take a final decision on this."

Bommai said that the Union Finance Ministry had, in its letter dated October 15, said that to facilitate creation of the special window for borrowing at optimum cost and for easy servicing of debt, it is necessary to provide authorisation to the Central Government to make payment of interest and repayment of principal from the compensation payable to the state.

CONTINUED ON: P7

India, China in 'confidential talks', says Jaishankar

PUSHKAR BANAKAR @ New Delhi

EXTERNAL Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday said India and China are engaged in "confidential talks" to resolve the ongoing border tensions.

"Discussions are on. Disengagement is a work in progress. What is going on is something confidential between us and the Chinese, There is not very much that I am in a position to say in public. I certainly do not want to prejudge it," he said speaking at the Bloomberg India Economic Forum.

The minister noted that there has been an unprecedented troop build-up along the Line of Actual Control. "The primary cause of disruption is when peace and tranquility are not ensured and the agreements that have been signed are not honoured," he said.

Jaishankar said the ties between India and China have improved since 1993 when the two countries signed a series of agreements on maintaining peace along the border.

Analysing the current tensions, he said that the challenge is to find equilibrium between the rise of India and the rise of China. "Can a rising China and rising India find equilibrium? What you see at the border is an expression of that challenge," he said.

A former diplomat, who did not wish to be named, said the minister was being cautious as China could not be fully trusted.

"Only a couple of days ago, China said it does not recognise Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh. The minister is making sure that he and his government are not making far-fetched comments, only to be embarrassed by China. Also, there are some diplomatic dialogues which cannot be out in the public," he said. P8

EXPRESS READ

Govt pushes CT Thorax scan in Covid care

Bengaluru: The State government on Thursday issued instructions to overcome false negative cases reported through RT-PCR tests by extending diagnostic methods to Covid-19-like syndrome for early treatment. It recommending CT Thorax scan findings and other lab investigations. P3

Bar owner shot dead in city, killers at large

Bengaluru: Manish Shetty (45), the owner of Duet Bar and Restaurant off Brigade Road, was shot dead by motorcycle-borne men late on Thursday evening, police said. Manish Shetty, a native of Koppa town, had just come out of the bar near Brigade Road when he was shot at. P5

WITH THIS ISSUE
BENGALURU'S BEST WEEKEND GUIDE
INDULGE
30 PAGES, INCLUDING 16 OF INDULGE (TABLOID)

K'TAKA COVID-19 BATTLE

8,477 TEST POSITIVE ON THURSDAY

10,283 TOTAL DEATHS

7,43,848 TOTAL CASES

6,20,008 TOTAL DISCHARGES

1,13,538 TOTAL ACTIVE CASES

3,000
People recover in Mysuru in just five days, with the district seeing a recovery rate of 82%

B'luru Urban reports 3,788 +ves on Thursday

An assistant in the office of the Secretary to the Chief Minister tests positive

• FULL COVERAGE P3

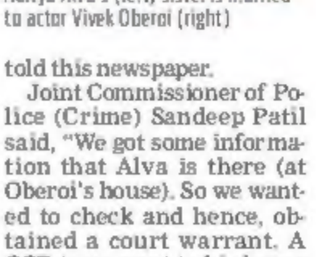
In hunt for drug case accused, cops raid actor Vivek Oberoi's house

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

BOLLYWOOD actor Vivek Oberoi's Mumbai residence was searched by Karnataka's Central Crime Branch (CCB) police in connection with the ongoing investigation in the Sandalwood drugs case. The search was carried out as the police had information that Aditya Alva, an absconding accused in the case, could be "hiding" there. Vivek Oberoi is married to Aditya Alva's sister Priyanka.

The police, who obtained a search warrant from a court, left for Mumbai on Wednesday and landed at Oberoi's residence on Thursday noon and searched the house for almost two hours. "The couple was agitated for a while, but cooperated later. However, no crucial information emerged from the search and the couple claimed that they were not in touch with (Aditya) Alva," an official said.

"Alva can opt to surrender before the court or before the CCB. With Thursday's search at Oberoi's residence, the CCB has sent a strong message to Alva that they will get him from wherever he is hiding. He may not like to put his family into trouble," sources privy to the raid in Mumbai told this newspaper.


Aditya Alva's (left) sister is married to actor Vivek Oberoi (right)

Joint Commissioner of Police (Crime) Sandeep Patil said, "We got some information that Alva is there (at Oberoi's house). So we wanted to check and hence, obtained a court warrant. A CCB team went to his house in Mumbai and searched the house". He added that Oberoi may know of Alva's whereabouts and hence, the house was raided.

Aditya, who is accused No. 6 (A6) in the FIR registered at Cottonpet police station, is the son of former Karnataka minister late Jeevaraj Alva. He has been absconding since September 4, when the CCB registered an FIR suo motu against him and 11 others, including Sandalwood actor Ragini Dwivedi, at the Cottonpet police station under the Narcotic Drugs & Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act and the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Dwivedi, along with another actor Sanjanna Galrani, was arrested and the duo is presently in judicial custody at the Bengaluru Central Prison at Parappana Agrahara.

"There have been sustained efforts by the CCB to get the absconding accused in the drugs case and they are following the trail of the three absconders – Aditya Alva, government employee Shivaprakash Chappi and alleged prime accused Sheikh Faazil, who is said to be a close associate of an MLA and runs a casino in Sri Lanka," said the source. The hunt for Alva in Mumbai comes a week after they searched the house of Ricky Rai, the son of late don-turned-politician Muthappa Rai, and questioned him. On September 22, the CCB issued a 'lookout notice' against Alva to prevent his escape from India. They raided Alva's sprawling family property — 'House of Life' — in Hebbal last month and claimed to have seized incriminating material from there.

Alva has reportedly emerged as "one of the main organisers of rave parties in the city along with events manager Viren Khanna and others. The CCB has arrested 12 suspects in the Cottonpet case.

RECLAIMING HABITAT

Jumbo hurdle ahead for Mekedatu project after SC order

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

THE Supreme Court order on strengthening the Mudumalai elephant corridor in the Nilgiri Biosphere in Tamil Nadu has come as a booster for the Karnataka Forest Department, which is now making its case strong for better elephant habitats and corridors, especially in the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary (CWS). This could well throw a spanner in the works for the Mekedatu reservoir project.

"The Supreme Court order will help strengthen the Hosur, Bannerghatta National Park, Satyamanagala and CWS corridor and habitat. But, if the Mekedatu project is cleared,a large portion of the elephant habitat will get submerged. The apex court orders to clear commercial projects and protect the Mudumalai elephant corridor will also help Karnataka. But immediate attention needs to be paid to the protection of the CWS, where the government is keen on implementing the Mekedatu reservoir project," a senior forest department official told TNIE.

Water Resources Minister Ramesh Jarkiholi had, in September, met Union Jal Shakti minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat urging that the project be

cleared at the earliest and environmental clearance be given.

However, Karnataka Forest Department officials pointed out, "No proposal had come to us for clearance and it cannot be approved also. The CWS was declared as a sanctuary in 1985, but the government is doing little for its protection."

An official from the National Board for Wildlife said, "The Mekedatu reservoir is proposed in the core CWS elephant habitat of CWS and clearing it will lead to submergence of a large forest patch, affecting the corridor. It cannot be cleared and the Supreme Court verdict will be beneficial now." Although the Karnataka Government had issued orders to reclaim forest land and strengthen elephant corridors and habitats, the Forest Department has been unable to acquire any land in last five years. P7